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ON THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN KODJA

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Abstract

Forty examples of the Kodja axe of the aborigines of Western Australia have been described by previous authors. A system of classification based on the trimming of the stones and the robustness of the handles has been advanced.

The present paper adds 23 examples to the list, and greatly increases the N. limits of its distribution. The former classification is shown to be now untenable. The theory that the Kodja had a ceremonial as well as a functional role is advanced.

Comments by first-hand observers in the first half of the nineteenth century have been discovered and these greatly assist in understanding the Kodja.

The object of this paper is to discuss 2 collections of Kodja which have apparently been overlooked by earlier writers. These 2 collections are numerically large enough to make an appreciable difference to the sum total of known examples, as well as to greatly increase the known range of their distribution. Two Kodja held in private collections are also described. After studying all the available information the author has arrived at the conclusion that most of the so called 'decadent' examples had a sociological and not a functional role in the economy of their makers.

Tindale (1950) described the specimens existing in several European and American Museums, as well as those held by the S. Australian, W. Australian and the Australian Museums. In a further paper (1951), he described additional specimens which came to his notice after the first paper was published. As a result of these 2 papers he made it known that at least 40 examples of this implement exist. These 40 specimens he has divided into 2 categories, the pre- and the post-European, or functional and demonstration models. He distinguished the one from the other mainly by whether the stones had a worked cutting edge and whether the handles were sturdy, and polished by use, or thin and crooked and showing no sign of handling.

According to this classification he divides the known examples as follows: Well made, used, early examples, 22. Demonstration models 18. Total 40. Of these, 14 were examined by him in Australian museums: W.A. 4, S.A. 3, N.S.W. 4, making a total of 11. Where the other 3 are is not stated. Of the 14 Australian examples, only 2 are said by him to be early, the other 12 were therefore presumably considered to be demonstration models.

Obviously this classification would seem to be untenable. Even if some were made for sale to Europeans, the number of genuine specimens in our collections would surely exceed this small percentage.

Davidson and McCarthy (1957) discussed the work of Tindale and slightly enlarged the distribution of the Kodja. They laid stress on the importance of an archaeological specimen of a single Kodja from Arnhem Land, in demonstrating the former wider distribution of the single, if not of the double Kodja. The claim of Tindale that a good percentage of the known examples are degenerate or demonstration models was not upheld by them and it was pointed out that—'so little information on the Kodja as used by the aborigines is available that this premise cannot be said to be supported by adequate data. The dates of collection of specimens

extant are seldom recorded and even if known would throw no light on dates of manufacture. No specimen is certified as having been made specially for exhibition or sale to a settler. If it could be established that some or all the "degenerate" specimens were made in late times, it would not necessarily follow that poor examples were not also made in prehistoric times. At present there is no evidence to show that the known specimens do not represent the normal range in quality.'

Ride, of the W. Australian Museum (1959), has drawn attention to a small series of edge-ground axe heads (his group D) which he claims to have been Kodja heads, and which he considers to have been a late development among the natives of SW. of W. Australia. It is certainly possible that Europeans might have facilitated the introduction of this idea, if not of actual examples, by bringing in natives from other areas. It is difficult to know just how widespread the use of such ground edge implements really was, or what was their real function, as well as their proper place in relation to Tindale's classification.

Tindale did not mention the Kodja in the National Museum of Victoria, where there are 9 examples, the largest collection in any Australian museum. Particulars of these are as follows:

National Museum Reg. No. 837: Obtained in 1890. A small specimen, with a sturdy serviceable handle, 9 in. long. The 2 stones, one for hammering, the other for cutting, are fortuitously shaped and have not been trimmed to shape by secondary chipping. They are made from fine grained igneous rock (greenstone) and are imbedded in a mass of resin which had been stained with red ochre. It is a well worn example. No locality.

No. 838: Obtained in 1890. A large and heavy implement fitted to a thin and frail handle, 10½ in. long. Both these stones have a cutting edge formed by fracture, but not trimmed. While one is mounted in the usual plane, the other has been mounted with the edge at right angles to the handle, thus conforming to the classical adze type. No sign of use is discernible on either of the stones, which are of fine grained igneous rock. The end of the handle is polished by rubbing. Collected by John Forrest from the Kardagur tribe, between the Vasse and Blackwood R., near Bunbury, W. Australia.

No. 839: A large implement, fitted with a sturdy handle 13½ in. long. The cutting edges are so obtuse that it could almost be said that both the stones are for hammering only. They are fortuitously shaped of fine grained igneous rock. There is no evidence of use on the stones, or polish on the handle. Obtained by John Forrest from the same locality and on the same date as No. 838.

No. 840: Also obtained in 1890. A medium sized implement with a thin handle, 9 in. long, which shows some sign of polish but no sign of use. The stones have been shaped by fracturing only and are not trimmed to shape. They are made from fine grained granitic rock. No locality.

No. 842: Obtained in 1890. In this specimen, both the stones have a cutting edge, and are of fine grained igneous rock. They are imbedded so deeply in the gum as to be quite unserviceable. The little of the cutting edges which protrudes is fortuitous and shows no sign of use. The handle is very sturdy, by far the thickest in the collection and is well polished. No locality.

No. 8597: Obtained in 1900. Hammer-axe of coarse grained granitic rock, showing no sign of trimming. The very thin and unserviceable handle is 12 in. long and shows no sign of polish. In this specimen the gum holding the stones in position has been chipped off one side, revealing the end of the handle. It is worthy of record that the part of the handle which is normally hidden from view, has been

purposely roughened and notched in order that the gum may better adhere to it. No locality.

No. 15666: Obtained in 1890. Both the stones are fortuitously shaped and have cutting edges but show no sign of use. The material is a fine grained igneous rock (greenstone). The handle is 10½ in. long, and of the 'unserviceable' type. It was obtained by John Forrest from the Whajook and Ballardong tribes of York, W. Australia.

No. 35648: Obtained in 1927. Stones in this specimen have received some flaking, but show no evidence of having been used. The material is a dark igneous rock. The handle is 9 in. long, sturdy, and well polished. Swan R., W. Australia.

No. 49894: Originally in the E. J. Dunn collection (No. 26) which was assembled in the 1880's. It is a massive implement, fitted with 2 very poor fortuitously shaped pieces of granitic rock and shows no sign of use. The 12 in. long handle is thin, unserviceable and yet highly polished. Collected on the S. coast, W. Australia.

It will be noted that the examples in this collection do not conform to Tindale's classification. In only one specimen is there any sign of trimming on the stones. but, as in most of the other Kodja, this particular example shows no sign of use, while it has a polished handle. It can be stated that the polish, or size of the handle, has no bearing on whether the hammer-axe was used or not. Further, in 8 of the 9 Kodja the blades are merely fractured pieces of stone, not trimmed in any way.

Another collection, not mentioned by Tindale, is one which was formed between 1863 and 1901 by the late Professor E. H. Giglioli, and now, I believe, in the Florence Municipal Museum. It is described in the first part of Giglioli's *La Collezione Etnografica* which was published at Città di Castello in 1911. The collection comprises 12 examples of Kodja, all fully documented. A translation of the description follows:

No. 110: Kodja or Kodju, hammer-axe made with 2 unshaped pieces of hard stone, one with a cutting edge, the other flat, imbedded in a block of black gum on which is affixed a short pointed stick serving as a handle. This is a characteristic instrument of the natives of Western Australia. From the Whajook, York District, W. Australia.

No. 111: Kodgi, hammer-axe. 2 pieces of granite, united and hafted in the usual way. Gum coloured reddish-brown with ochre (wilgee). From the Ballardong Tribe, York District, W. Australia.

Nos. 112-113: 2 Kadjo hammer-axes of the usual type of W. Australia. The pieces of stone are of a pretty green quartzite. The handles are well worked and polished, which is not generally the case. From the Kakarakala tribe of the Gascoyne R., W. Australia.

No. 114: Kaddu, hammer-axe. The 2 stones are of granite. The handle is decorated with engraved cross lines. From the Yungar tribe of Newcastle, W. Australia.

No. 115: Kodgi or Kooga, hammer-axe. Stones of granite, coloured red. From the Kardagar tribe of the Blackwood R., W. Australia.

No. 116: Kodja. Typical hammer-axe. The stones are of a rough greenish quarzite. From the Minnal Yungar tribe, Victoria Plains, W. Australia.

No. 117: Kaijoo, hammer-axe, very heavy. The 2 stones are very dense and black, of what appears to be diorite. Both the stones and the handle are patinated by long use. Obtained from a Kimurra of Nickol Bay, W. Australia.

No. 118: Kodgii, hammer-axe. The head is big and heavy. The 2 stones are of dark-grey quartzite. The handle is ornamented with 3 stripes of black gum. From the Peopleman-nunger tribe of the lower Blackwood R.

No. 119: Kokio or Coccio. Double axe. Both the stones have a cutting edge and are of grey quartzite, tinted red, like the gum. From the Tirarop tribe, New Norcia, W. Australia.

No. 365: Kodjer or Gadjoo, hammer-axe. It is the well known and characteristic stone implement of the natives of the W. littoral of Australia. It consists of 2 pieces of hard stone, unworked, one with a cutting edge, the other blunt, fixed by means of a lump of gum on to a small stick. From the Toodemunjer tribe, NE. of Perth, W. Australia.

No. 2399: Kooga, hammer-axe of rough syenite. Of the primitive type belonging to the natives of the S. littoral of W. Australia. 2 unshaped pieces of rock, one with a cutting edge, the other blunt, fixed in a lump of Xanthorrhea gum, in this case tinted brown-red. Obtained from natives in the vicinity of Bunbury, SW. of W. Australia.

In examining this data some rather interesting points can be noted. First, there are the native names, which seem to differ slightly with each tribe. Then there is the statement that the stones are unshaped and unworked, and the handles are only mentioned as being well worked and polished in Nos. 112-113 with the qualification 'which is not generally the case'. But the main value of this collection is that it greatly extends the N. limit of the Kodja's distribution. McCarthy and Davidson stated that the double Modja's limit in this direction 'seems to have been Northampton, or possibly the Murchison River, rather than Geraldton as formerly thought'. It can now be safely claimed that it is Nickol Bay. This also vindicates the veracity of the label attached to the specimen mentioned by Tindale as being in the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford; this label states that the specimen came from the 'Pidungu tribe, 60 miles from Derby'. Davidson and McCarthy doubted the probability of the Kodja ranging this far; the Giglioli specimen settles this question. It is well to remember the passage in Curr. Vol. 1, p. 297 which states that in this locality 'for knives and tomahawks, flints sharpened by chipping are used, which are fastened to a stick, or to the butt of the miro (throwing stick) in some cases, with a very tenacious sort of "bitumen", as my informant says, but more probably by gum. With a stone or flint thus stuck on to a stick, a black will cut through a thick log of wood'. This description probably refers to a single Kodja, nevertheless the Giglioli specimen proves that in this location the double Kodja was also used.

Two other Kodja, both in private collections, are known to the present writer. The first, in the S. R. Mitchell Collection, at Frankston, Victoria, is a massive implement, furnished with 2 untrimmed grey granite stones, one with a cutting edge, the other flat. This last shows some signs of use. It is fitted with a sturdy, serviceable handle only $6\frac{1}{2}$ in. long, well polished and ending in a blunt, fire hardened point. No locality.

The second is in the F. Smith Collection, Mt. Dandenong, Victoria. The heavily patinated stones in this specimen are of fine grained igneous rock, one blunt, the other with a well trimmed cutting edge. Neither show any sign of use. The handle, $11\frac{1}{4}$ in. long terminates in a charred point. It is strong and serviceable and has a very high polish. No locality.

Coming now to the question as to whether the Kodja with untrimmed blades and thin, unpolished handles were made for sale to Europeans and do not conform to those formerly used by the aborigines, the present writer is of the opinion that this is not the case, and that the arguments advanced by Davidson and McCarthy in reference to this are sound.

The first description of a Kodja was given by King (1827). He stated that among the natives of King George III Sound 'the hammer, or kaoit, appears to be used only for the purpose of breaking open shell fish, and killing seals and other animals by striking them on the head; for it has no sharpened edge to be used as a chopping, or cutting instrument; the handle is from 12 to 15 in. long, having one end scraped to a sharp point, and on each side at the other end two pieces of hard stone fixed and cemented by a mass of gum, which, when dry, is almost as hard as the stone itself; the hammer is about 1 lb. weight'.

In this respect it is well to consult an early authority on the W. Australian aborigines, who is very seldom quoted: Monsignor Rudesindo Salvado, the founder of New Norcia. He arrived in Perth in January 1846, and immediately proceeded

to live amongst the blacks. In 1851 he published his *Memorie Storiche dell'Australia,* which work was translanted into French in 1854, but as far as I know, never into English. Quoting from the Italian edition, on page 325 there is a description of the Kodja. He states—'The Coccio somewhat resembles our hammer and axe united on the same haft, only the materials differing. At the end of a small stick of wood, a little under a foot long and as thin as the little finger of a man, they unite, by means of the very tenacious gum from the *Xantorea,* two stones, one flat to serve as hammer, the other cutting to serve as an axe'. He then goes on to describe the use to which this implement is put, such as—'to secure game from dead trees, cut footholds on trunks of trees to enable them to climb, fashion their weapons, break the bones of the kangaroo, and other animals in order to extract the marrow for food or to annoint themselves, and a thousand other uses. The stone used for these implements is a hard, grey granite, which is only found far from the coast. When the lump of gum, the size of an average lemon, is rendered pliable by the action of heat, the wooden handle, which had previously been lit at the fire, is pushed half way through it while still burning. The two stones, having been heated also, are then pushed into the gum, one on each side of the haft. The hardness and lasting qualities of this putty render the Coccio as useful as a European hammer. The Coccio is always carried at the back, between the spine and the belt, so that the handle naturally fits between the buttocks and is thus well out of the way'.

Previously, on page 319, Salvado described the belt which he claims was the only article of clothing as well as a prized ornament, of the natives. It is made of possum fur, and is used to carry all manner of things. Through it, at the back, was also carried the Coccio. He further states that 'the natives love this ornament and gladly exchange any of their weapons for a little possum string with which to make one. This is almost their only article of commerce. Many are without the belt, and the women do not wear it.'

Earlier, King (1827) had stated—'the noodle-bul or belt, in which they carry their hammer and knife, is manufactured from the fur of the opossum, spun into a small yarn like worsted; it is tightly bound at least three or four hundred times round the stomach; very few, however, possessed this ornament; and it is not improbable that the natives who had their hair clubbed, those that wore belts, and the one who was ornamented with shells, held some particular offices in the tribe, which it would be difficult for strangers to discover'.

The present writer would advance the theory that among some tribes the Kodja worn in conjunction with the belt would acquire an ornamental, and therefore sociological, as well as a functional value. This would account for the unserviceable handles, in many cases polished, not by use, but by rubbing against the body, and for the crude shape of the stones in most Kodja. These would be examples worn solely for effect, and possibly never used, much like the buttons on the sleeves of our coats, or across the back of our dress suits, which are unfunctional survivals of very necessary adjuncts to the coats of our ancestors.

An exact counterpart is seen in the Punjab, where village headmen do not consider themselves fully dressed unless they carry a long staff fitted with a highly decorated axe head, which is purely conventional, and never used.

In this respect it is as well to mention the 'ceremonial' axes from the Mt. Hagen area of New Guinea. These axes are furnished with a beautifully ground and polished blade often of great size. This blade is so thin as to be almost fragile. In any case, the fine bevelled edge would soon break if the axe were ever used. The slate they are made from would not resist a blow even against soft wood. The blade is mounted in a cavity of the haft and kept secure by bindings of tapa and cane. It

is counterbalanced by a piece of wood of the same general shape as the axe head, often carved, and decorated with fibre chains and fur. The handle of this axe is as unserviceable as the handle of the Kodja. It is thin and pointed and out of all proportion to the weight of the axe.

How do these axes fit into the lives of their owners? Höltker (1942) published a paper which gives the answer. A translation of part of it would read as follows: 'By the expression "Ceremonial Axe" it is not meant that the implement is only used ceremonially, but only that it is not used for practical purposes. It is an object which a man keeps constantly by his side, like the bow and arrows, as a badge of his manliness and importance. For this reason it is always carried on visits to neighbouring villages. When used at all the axe is used for small jobs, or, if necessity arises, as a weapon. It is carried either over the shoulder, or the handle is pushed through the belt at the back of the body. It has also an ornamental function, as when worn at dances. Another of its functions is to form part of the bride-price.' Riesenfeld (1950) claimed that they serve as ceremonial and battle axes, as well as important articles of trade.

This triple function of the axes is also recorded from other parts of New Guinea. In the Trobriands for instance, Malinowski (1934) states that when shaped, very thin and highly polished, blades acquire an ornamental value. He further states that 'one seldom sees a man of rank and influence, especially during feasts and ceremonies, without a ligogu over his shoulder. Nowadays a steel blade takes the place of the ancient greenstone'. A third class of blades were the very large ones, some even too large to receive the huge, decorated handles, thus becoming quite unserviceable as axes, and too heavy and awkward to be carried. These become objects of the highest value and tokens of wealth. The same author (1922) had earlier claimed that white traders still had to use stone axe blades for payment of pearls purchased from the natives. Seligmann (1910) included them amongst the articles used as bride-price.

The present writer does not suggest that there exists any connection between the axes of New Guinea and those of W. Australia, but it is suggested that the two peoples used their axes for analogous purposes.

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